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FM REO BASRAH

TO RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0368

RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0785

INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

RUEHBC/REO BASRAH 0822

C O N F I D E N T I A L BASRAH 000068

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL IR I2

SUBJECT: BRANCH CHIEF OF NATIONAL UNITY ASSEMBLY SPEAKS TO REO

CLASSIFIED BY: Ramon Negron, Director, Regional Embassy Office Basrah, Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (b)

¶1. (C) Summary: On Sunday, 10, Bahaa Nasir Hussein al-Khafaji, Branch Chief of the National Unity Assembly, met with Poloff at the Regional Embassy Office in Basrah. Bahaa lamented Baghdad's failure to negotiate an acceptable election law and predicted that late elections would benefit religious candidates, particularly Badr, Fadhliah, and the Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS). Bahaa also spoke out against Kurdish control of Kirkuk and voiced suspicions that ISCI and Badr are gaining too much influence over the Iraqi High Electoral Commission (IHEC). End Summary.

¶2. (C) On Sunday, August 10, Bahaa Nasir Hussein al-Khafaji, Branch Chief of the National Unity Assembly and coordinator for the National Trend coalition, met with Poloff at the Regional Embassy Office in Basrah. Commenting on his party, which he claimed was founded in 1991, Bahaa identified it as secular and nationalist. He explained that party funding comes primarily from the General Secretary, Dr. Nihero Mohammad abd al-Karim al-Kaznazani, an independently wealthy businessman who owns Booban Corporation, a joint venture/trading company.

¶3. (C) Bahaa expressed concern over the election-law debate, reasoning that passage of the law was purposely being delayed so elections could take place during December, a Shi'a religious month. This would be advantageous for religious candidates, who are otherwise expected to lose seats in the next election. He was also concerned with proposed election procedures for Kirkuk, given that his party is opposed to Kurdish control over the city. He explained that the House of Five (Note: The House of Five is a local term for ISCI, Badr, Shaheed al-Mehrab, Sayyid al-Shuhadah, and Tharallah) cannot approach the Kurds on the Kirkuk issue, as it could jeopardize their own regional aspirations for southern Iraq. Bahaa warned that if Basrah were to become a region, it would be controlled by Iran.

¶4. (C) Pointing to concerns about corruption, Bahaa predicted that secular candidates will not do well in the next election. He speculates that Badr will take most seats, followed by Fadhliah, and then OMS. The remaining seats will be claimed by secularists and independents.

¶5. (C) Bahaa suspects that IHEC is in the hands of ISCI and Badr. He explained that of the 5,000 employees that General Elections Officer Hazim Jodah asked for, about 60 percent resigned after learning the actual terms of employment were not what they expected. Bahaa is convinced that ISCI and Badr will send their supporters to fill the vacancies, filling IHEC with religious party sympathizers. When pressed, he admitted he had no proof, but stated that "it is so." He added that the IHEC media official, Amar Muthanah Yaseen al-Ruthan, is loyal to Iran and has very strong ties to Badr and Sayid Yousif Snawi of Tharallah. Bahaa then related rumors that Sayid Yousif Snawi would be released and that people were scared.

NEGRON